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Surinamese Official Held in Drug Deal

We reported evidence last December that the Marxist government of Suriname, the former Dutch colony on the northeast coast of South America, was engaged in drug trafficking. Cocaine processed in a jungle factory guarded by Surinamese troops was being shipped to Amsterdam in diplomatic pouches, according to Dutch intelligence sources.

Now the Drug Enforcement Administration has confirmed our report. On March 24, federal agents arrested three Surinamese citizens in Miami. DEA agents, posing as smugglers, said the suspects agreed to provide a safe place to refuel drug-laden aircraft en route from Colombia to the United States. The price: \$1 million per plane.

The case has created an international scandal thanks to the identity of one of those arrested: Etienne Boerenveen, a member of the five-man military junta that has ruled Suriname since Desi Bouterse seized power in a 1980 coup. The Netherlands government is particularly embarrassed because it had just secretly offered to resume aid to Suriname—\$25 million worth—in exchange for a pledge to restore democracy in that country. Dutch and American aid was abruptly stopped when Bouterse executed 15 opposition leaders in 1982.

Boerenveen bragged to the undercover agent that he was the No. 2 man in the Bouterse regime. He entered the United States on a diplomatic passport and has tried to claim diplomatic immunity.

Before his arrest, "Boerenveen offered protection to ether and cocaine transshipment," court records state. "[He] would provide small boats and trucks to transport ether" from freighters to Surinamese refineries and back. He told the DEA agents that he "controlled the police, the military, the ports and security of all airfields" in Suriname, according to the court records.

Suriname is concerned about Boerenveen's arrest. Officials have threatened to break off already tenuous diplomatic ties with the United States if his diplomatic status is not recognized.

As we reported, Suriname has become a refuge for Colombian drug lords forced out by President Belisario Betancur in recent years. Sources told our associate Donald Goldberg the Bouterse regime invited the drug bosses into Suriname because of its desperate need for hard currency after the cutoff of Dutch and U.S. aid.

Bouterse's situation worsened in 1983. His mentor had been Maurice Bishop, the Marxist leader of Grenada who was deposed and murdered by Cuban-backed rivals, leading to the U.S. invasion. Fearful that Suriname might be next, Bouterse expelled his Cuban military advisers—and welcomed the Colombian cocaine lords.

Shortly after Boerenveen's arrest, Suriname accused the United States of "setting up" Boerenveen because of its close ties to Libya. Our intelligence sources say Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi sent more than 200 advisers to Suriname; in return, he asked for Surinamese passports for his international assassination squads.